



12-2019

Weatherlessness: Affect, Mood, Temperament, the Death of the Will, and Politics

John J. Stuhr
Emory University

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.13023/disclosure.28.06>

Follow this and additional works at: <https://uknowledge.uky.edu/disclosure>



Part of the [Ethics and Political Philosophy Commons](#)

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 License](#).



Recommended Citation

Stuhr, John J. (2019) "Weatherlessness: Affect, Mood, Temperament, the Death of the Will, and Politics," *disClosure: A Journal of Social Theory*. Vol. 28 , Article 10.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.13023/disclosure.28.06>

Available at: <https://uknowledge.uky.edu/disclosure/vol28/iss1/10>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Social Theory at UKnowledge. It has been accepted for inclusion in *disClosure: A Journal of Social Theory* by an authorized editor of UKnowledge. For more information, please contact UKnowledge@lsv.uky.edu.

Weatherlessness: Affect, Mood, Temperament, the Death of the Will, and Politics

John J. Stuhr
Emory University

First, I develop an account of the nature of moods and the relation of mood to emotion and temperament. This account stresses that social and individual moods are marked by four features: They are *transactional* – neither wholly subjective nor objective; in experience they *shade into and blur back and forth with feeling and temperament*; they are *ambient and atmospheric*, a habit of living in the world more expansive than a habit of mind; and, whether conscious or not, moods have causes that, if known, *may be manipulated* to advance both personal and political ends. Second, I focus on a particular mood that, following the novelist John Barth, I term “weatherlessness.” I then distinguish weatherlessness from both learned helplessness and manufactured consent. Third, I conclude by showing ways in which weatherlessness is fatal to democracy, to government *of, by, and for* the people. Here I suggest ways in which weatherlessness can be a tool used by authoritarian regimes, including those that disguise themselves as democracies.

John J. Stuhr is Arts and Sciences Distinguished Professor of Philosophy and American Studies at Emory University. His writing and teaching focus on ethics, political philosophy, and contemporary cultural issues and they draw primarily on resources in 19th and 20th century American and European thought. He is the author of many books, including most recently *Pragmatic Fashions: Pluralism, Democracy, Relativism, and the Absurd* (Indiana University Press, 2016). He is also the founding director of the American Philosophies Forum and the editor of *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*. Contact: jstuhr@emory.edu

© 2019 The Author(s). This is an open access article published under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided that the original author(s) and the publication source are credited.

<https://doi.org/10.13023/disclosure.28.06>

1. Moods

Supposing that truth is a mood – what then? Supposing every philosophy and every politics expresses the mood of its originators – what then?

OK, don't even try to answer these questions, don't even start to read this essay until you're in the right mood. Following a good sleep and healthy breakfast. Your mouth holding a pen crosswise, not by its end. A sunny day and pleasant breeze, maybe some exercise or some time in the park. When you want to be right here, right where you are. After an ocean of love. That could make all the difference. And this difference is not merely personal: Associations, organizations, governments, and cultures call forth, are marked by, and nourish or starve particular moods. Moods may be political; they may be manipulated to advance both personal and political ends.

What is a mood? With roots in Old English, Gothic German, and Old Norse words for mind, spirit, courage, and anger, mood is typically defined as *an individual's particular and temporary feeling or state of mind, a distinctive emotional quality or tone, a pervading impression or general attitude or tone of some thing or some time, and a person's inclination or disposition or receptivity or temper to some activity or thing.* (The term also has specialized and precise meanings in logic (as classification of categorical syllogisms) and grammar (as categories of verb inflection to indicate syntactic relations among clauses or attitudes of speakers with respect to certainty/uncertainty, wish/command, and emphasis/hesitancy. I note here that the main character discussed in this essay's next section is a grammar teacher – in part a teacher of moods.) Mood is most often attributed to individuals, but a mood may be a feature of a social group, political regime, or historical era – e.g., the mood of a people during a war or the mood of an age of enlightenment or time

of famine – or to creative works – e.g., the characteristic mood of a painter's period of work or the tone of a piece of music – or a location – e.g., the mood of a military cemetery or the feel of a lake house. In her song, "Ventura," Lucinda Williams (2003) sings:

Haven't spoken to no one
Haven't been in the mood
Pour some soup, get a spoon and
Stir it up real good.

Sometimes "mood" is used almost synonymously with "feeling" or "emotion" – such that, for example, to be in a good mood is simply to feel cheerful or have positive emotions and to be in a bad mood is to feel irritated or suffer from negative emotions. Many psychologists, however, differentiate emotion and mood. In these cases, an emotion or "emotional episode" is characterized as an experience marked by: a particular (usually relatively short-term) quality and caused by particular physiological (e.g., neurological and endocrinal) changes and conditions; behaviors (e.g., smiling or running away) caused by and consistent with this experience; attention directed toward an eliciting stimulus; cognitive appraisal of the meaning and possible consequences of the stimulus; and, attribution of the genesis of the experience to the stimulus. An important point here is that emotions are *not* reactions to perceptions and then, afterwards, the cause of bodily expressions. Instead, perceptions give rise to bodily expressions the awareness of which is emotion. William James (1981 [1890]) put this nicely: "Bodily changes follow directly the perception of the exciting fact, and . . . our feeling of the same changes as they occur is the emotion." We feel sorry because we cry and afraid because we tremble, James explained; we do not cry because we feel sorry or tremble because we are afraid. Without the bodily expressions

following perception, those perceptions would be wholly cognitive – we might judge it best to run but we “should not actually feel afraid” (1065-66). So characterized, emotions are brought about *by something*, are feelings of bodily reactions *to something*, and are *about something* cognitively appraised. Examples include anger, fear, sadness, happiness, disgust, and surprise. Indeed, many researchers argue that these are the six, and only, universal emotions. That may be right, but I’d like to think that the sentiment of rationality – James’s phrase for the fact that rationality itself is a sentiment – might be very widespread too.

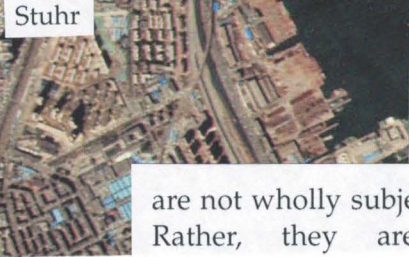
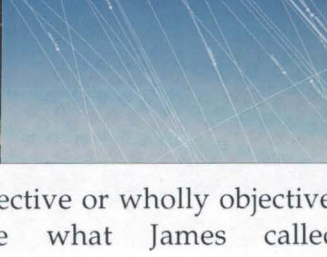
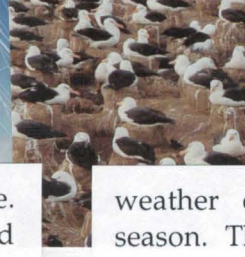
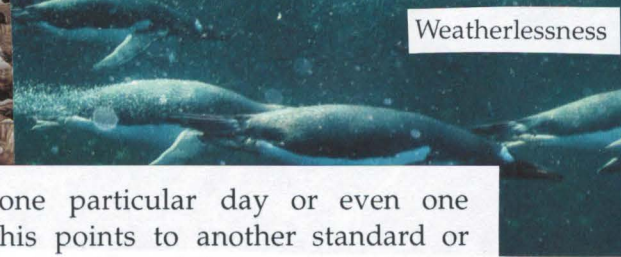
By contrast, a mood is characterized as an affective state that lasts longer than an emotion and often is temporally distant from the stimulus and its resulting behavior that is its cause (e.g., waking up one morning in a bad mood because of an argument several months earlier or being depressed years after the death of a loved one). This includes moods brought on by causes unrecognized by the given individual – causes such as nutrition, weather, facial muscles, physical activity, persistent poverty, a culture of violence, structural absence of opportunity, and so on. A mood is more diffuse and general than an emotion – less about something in particular that is cognitively appraised and more about everything in general (e.g., anxiety not about an important exam in an hour but about one’s whole future); less a reaction to something in particular than a reaction to life more generally (e.g., irritability brought on not by one particular co-worker but by absolutely everyone around); and less brought on by something particular but, instead, more sustained across many different particular experiences (e.g., a depressive state due to the totality of one’s self). So characterized, moods are relatively long term, broad scope, and diffuse affective states. From this perspective, moods are generally viewed as having two primary dimensions or valences: positive affect (and the positive consequences

of this affect) and negative affect (and the negative consequences of this affect); that is, being in a good mood or being in a bad mood. Examples of moods include depression, anxiety, resignation, confidence, and serenity.

I accept and want to make use of the notion of mood understood in this brief, unfinished but, I hope, workable sketch. That said, I also want to add four important points to this account of mood. First, any adequate account of mood must be *shady*. This means it must not claim neat separations between instincts, emotions, moods, and temperaments. Rather, they blur into one another. To note this is simply to extend an observation by James (1981 [1890]): “Instinctive reactions and emotional expressions thus shade imperceptibly into each other” (1058). So too do emotions, moods, and temperaments. We can feel hopeful or be in a hopeful mood or have a hopeful temperament. Somebody can just be an anxious person, find one’s self in an anxious mood, or feel anxious. As James (1981 [1890]) noted, “The result of all this flux is that the merely descriptive literature of the emotions is one of the most tedious parts of psychology. And not only is it tedious, but you feel that its subdivisions are to a great extent either fictitious or unimportant, and that its pretences to accuracy are a sham” (1064). Differences in both life and language among instincts, emotions, moods, and temperaments are shady, blurry, vague. An emotion can coexist with or produce a mood or a temperament over time, but so too a mood can call forth and exist simultaneously with a particular emotion.

I go out with a friend
Maybe a little music might help
But I can't pretend
I wish I was somewhere else (Williams 2003).

Second, any adequate account of mood must be *transactional*. This means that moods







are not wholly subjective or wholly objective. Rather, they are what James called "double-barreled," applying to both the *how* and the *what* of experience, features of irreducibly interrelated consciousness and object. Moods are what John Dewey (1989 [1949]) called "unfractured" – without radical separation between knower and known, namer and named, organism and environment, subject and object (96-97). For Heidegger as for Dewey, moods are features of a world, not simply subjective overlays or reactions to it. Just as Dewey asserted that reality possesses practical character, so too it possesses affective character. Reality is moody. Our ordinary language captures this and displays our unsettlement about our being in a mood or a mood being in us. Place: The dark streets were foreboding, tense, unforgiving, full of danger, without hope. Action: The gunfire was terrifying, scary, frightening, horrific. Person: After her death, he was disconsolate, depressed, unable to cope, dark, without joy. Time: "Ah distinctly, I remember, it was in the bleak December," the mood was grim, there were shootings almost every day, it was a dismal period. The affective is thick and stretches across our lives. In now-outdated language, tertiary qualities are features of reality – and that includes emotion, mood, and temperament. Mood colors, fixes, and transforms both the *how* and the *what* of experience.

Third, affect includes more than instinct, feeling, and mood. It is *ambient and atmospheric*. It also includes temperament. By temperament I mean not just a person's or a group's habit of mind, but something more expansive – one's habit of living, one's constitution or characteristic modes of feeling and action. As feelings come and go and shade into more diffuse moods that may last a while or longer, so too moods often shade and blur into temperaments. In such cases, moods become habitual in duration and wide in scope – affective undergoings, doings, and dispositions across wide swaths of one's life. They become whole climates rather than the

weather one particular day or even one season. This points to another standard or dictionary meaning of "temperament" that sheds additional light: temperament is the condition of the weather or climate, regarded as resulting from a combination of heat or cold, dryness or humidity. One's temperament is one's personal weather. We all know some people who are warm, others who are cold, some who are arid, and yet others who are stormy (and so on). Understood this way, temperament shares more with feeling and less with mood a connection with action and disposition to action. Icy feelings and an icy temperament are called forth and displayed in icy behavior; an icy mood is more atmospheric – "I had no idea you were in that kind of mood!" – and may be barely evident in action. Affects blur along a temporal arc of shorter-term feelings, longer-lasting moods, and relatively durable temperaments.

The fourth point about moods is this: They have causes. They are the product of physiological, environmental, and cultural conditions. The fact that a person may not know what brought on a mood (e.g., "I have no idea why I'm in such an unhappy mood") does not mean that the existence of the mood is irreducibly mysterious or unknowable. Just as it is possible to manufacture feelings (e.g., "If I let her in on this secret, she will be so jealous"), so too it is possible to manufacture moods (e.g., "We had to get out of the Pacific Northwest to cure his seasonal affective disorder," or, "Whenever the manager turned on Fox News, I felt anger at Trump and my whole mood turned confrontational and hostile"). This has potential practical implications for anyone marketing products, ideas, or regimes – or even philosophies if one accepts Deleuze and Guattari's (1994 [1991]) observation that "philosophy has not remained unaffected by the general movement that replaced Critique with sales promotion" (10). As it is possible to inflame a crowd, create desires, learn emotions and emotional responses, produce belief, and



engineer consent, so it is possible to manufacture mood – crucial perhaps in some kinds of administration of populations.

Individual and social moods, then, are shady and transactional, blurring back and forth with feeling and temperament, and caused by conditions that, if known, may be manipulated to advance both personal and political ends.

2. Weatherlessness

In light of this general understanding of mood, I want to focus briefly on a particular mood for the purpose of reflecting on its origins and its political as well as personal uses. I take the name for this mood – *weatherlessness* – from the novelist John Barth. To be weatherless is to be in a moodless mood, to be without climate, without feeling, freedom, or purpose. When habitual, it is the complete absence of disposition and inclination, the absence of any temperament. It is to be helpless, unable to act and without desires or goals, paralyzed to the point of inaction. Just as Hemingway recorded the death of love after World War I in *The Sun Also Rises*, so Barth recounted the death of the will after World War II in his 1958 novel, *The End of the Road* (1969 [1958]). Hemingway chronicled the “lost generation” while Barth illuminated the “submission generation.” For the book’s “hero,” Jacob Horner, there is no convincing reason to prefer or do anything and so he does nothing (except at the command of the “Doctor,” a psychiatrist-counselor-mentor-God, as impersonal, aloof, and inexplicable as fate).

The book opens with a six-word sentence suggesting uncertainty and absurdity: “In a sense, I am Jacob Horner” (Barth 1969 [1958], 1). Next: “It was on the advice of the Doctor that I entered the teaching profession.” The mood of weatherlessness and a temperament of paralysis are set quickly: Readers are treated to two long paragraphs dealing solemnly with the vexing problems of how to sit

properly in the Doctor’s office and the equally grave problem of how one’s arms should be placed. After discussing the shifting of positions and arms, Jacob Horner tells us that the story of his life is contained in the sentence which says that this shifting is a “recognition of the fact that when one is faced with such a multitude of desirable choices, no one choice seems satisfactory for very long by comparison with the aggregate desirability of all the rest, though compared to any one of the others it would not be found inferior.” This sentence, which Jacob Horner describes as “a double predicate nominative expression in the second independent clause of a rather intricate compound sentence” (Barth 1969 [1958], 2-3), not only shows that Horner is a grammar teacher but also reveals Barth’s contempt for conventional rules and societal customs, for sense and order, for logic and principles. Jacob Horner’s mastery of these techniques was no avail against his impotency.

You like it under the trees in autumn,
Because everything is half dead
The wind moves like a cripple among the
leaves
And repeats words without meaning.
... you yourself were never quite yourself
And did not want nor have to be,
Desiring the exhilarations of changes:
The motive for metaphor, shrinking from
The weight of primary noon,
The ABC of being (Stevens 1993 [1947],
288).

Factually and briefly, *The End of the Road* is a story supposedly written by Jake Horner in 1955 about an incident, which took place in 1953, an event caused by the advice of the strange Doctor whom Horner met in 1951 and with whom he is doomed to serve the rest of his aimless, empty life. The novel opens with the Doctor’s advice to Jake Horner to go to third-rate Wicomico State Teachers College in Maryland’s Eastern Shore to get a job teaching grammar. At Wicomico, Jake’s first

and only friend is Joe Morgan, a liberal academic "emancipated" from objective values: "What the hell, Jake," says Joe, "when you say good-bye to objective values, you really have to flex your muscles and keep your eyes open, because you're on your own. It takes energy; not just personal energy, but cultural energy, or you're lost. Energy's what makes the difference between American pragmatism and French existentialism – where the hell else but in America could you have a cheerful nihilism, for God's sake?" (Barth 1969 [1958], 47). Jake had also said goodbye to objective values – after all, he had been ordered by the Doctor to read Sartre and to be an existentialist and instructed that "Choosing is existence: To the extent you don't choose, you don't exist" (Barth 1969 [1958], 83) – but he did not accept Joe's cheerful spirit. He had no experience of himself as a unified self. Jake claimed: "Indeed, the conflict between individual points of view that Joe admitted lay close to heart of his subjectivism I should carry even further, for subjectivism implies a self, and where one feels a plurality of selves, one is subject to the same conflict on an intensely intramural level, each of one's selves claiming the same irrefutable validity for its special point of view that, in Joe's system individuals and institutions may claim" (Barth 1969 [1958], 142). Here Barth pokes fun at the American Dream, American progressivism, and meliorism that smile in the face of adversity and hope for better things ahead. Jake does not smile. He is immobilized, helpless, sapped of will, doomed to immobility and living what Wallace Stevens (1993 [1949]) characterized as a "skeleton's life" in "As You Leave the Room":

I wonder, have I lived a skeleton's life,
As a disbeliever in reality,
A countryman of all the bones in the
world?
Now, here, the snow I had forgotten
becomes
Part of a major reality, part of

An appreciation of a reality

...

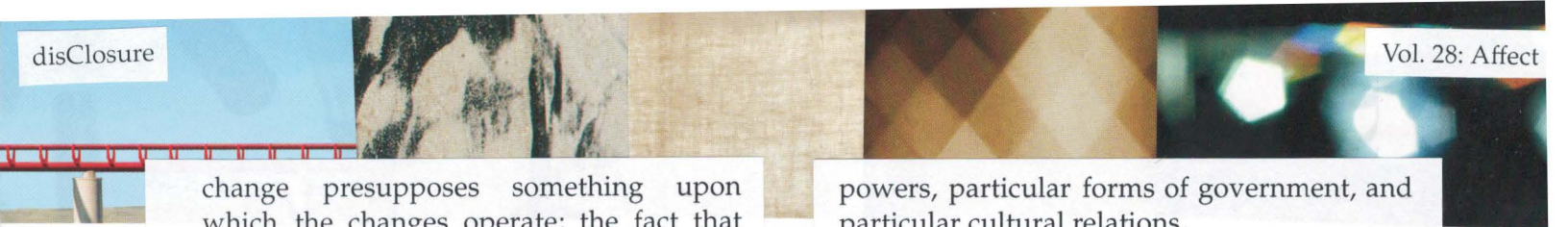
And yet nothing has been changed except
what is

Unreal, as if nothing had been changed at
all (488).

Joe kept pushing his wife, Rennie, toward Jake and found ways for them to spend time together. When he learns of their affair, Joe makes it the subject of long, open philosophical conversations, as he does when Rennie becomes pregnant (whether by Jake or Joe no one knows). After a discussion of death as the only alternative to bearing the unwanted child, the three discuss another alternative, abortion. Jake's Doctor agrees to perform the abortion, the price being complete ownership of Jake for the rest of his life. Rennie is killed on the operating table, leaving Jake to break the news to Joe. Joe disappears into oblivion while Jake departs by taxi for the Doctor's Remobilization Farm where he is fated to live his life in complete dependence on, and total submission to, the Doctor. The book's final word – Jake says this to the driver – is "Terminal" (Barth 1969 [1958], 198).

Weatherlessness: After recounting a dream in which a meteorologist announces that there simply will be no weather tomorrow, Jake says this:

A day without weather is unthinkable, but for me at least there were frequently days without any mood at all. On these days, Jacob Horner, except in a meaningless metabolistic sense, ceased to exist, for I was without a personality. Like those microscopic specimens that biologists must dye in order to make them visible at all, I had to be colored with some mood or other if there was to be a recognizable self to me. The fact that my successive and discontinuous selves were linked to one another by the two unstable threads of body and memory; the fact that in the nature of Western languages the word



change presupposes something upon which the changes operate; the fact that although the specimen is invisible without the dye, the dye is not the specimen – these are considerations of which I was aware but in which I had no interest. On my weatherless days my body sat in a rocking chair and rocked and rocked and rocked, and my mind was as nearly empty as interstellar space (Barth 1969 [1958], 36).


And like the bodies of individual persons, so too political bodies may sit in a rocking chair, just rocking and empty.

3. Manufactured Helplessness and Politics

Barth's novel presented a mood of weatherlessness, the absence of temperament and disposition – the death of the will – and the resulting paralysis and impotence of action primarily as an *individual's* (Jacob's) psychological condition and as a philosophical problem (if one makes certain "existentialist" assumptions about the world, freedom and choice, and values). I want now to consider weatherlessness and the death of the will in a more explicitly *political* context because I find these ideas illuminate central commitments and problems for democratic practice – for practices that broadly value and are marked by broad participation, consent, and benefit of the governed. To do this, it is necessary to view weatherlessness not simply as an individual trait but as a social *product* – something socially manufactured (indirectly – whether fully conscious or not – via sentiments) in particular ways in particular times and places with particular consequences for particular selves. The reason for doing this is straight-forward: the self, to use the language of George Herbert Mead, is a social product (and so there can be no question about mood being either only wholly personal or only wholly social). It is also necessary to view weatherlessness as a cultural *deployment* – a strategy (conscious or not) on behalf of particular interests and

powers, particular forms of government, and particular cultural relations.

In this light, it is helpful to contrast weatherlessness and the death of the will with two other phenomena: learned helplessness and manufactured consent. Following Seligman (1975a, 1975b, and 1993), learned helplessness is a condition in which a person, after a traumatic experience or repeated harm and failure, learns powerlessness and absence of control and then gives up even trying, taking no action to avoid subsequent harm – even in subsequent changed conditions in which the harm could be escaped or stopped. Two points stand out here: the helplessness learned in the original situation is warranted – the subject actually is helpless with respect to the given trauma or harm; and, in later changed conditions, the habituated helplessness does not appear warranted to third-party observers who know surely the conditions have changed such that the person is no longer helpless, but it does appear warranted to the person who has no reason to realize that conditions have changed – and who finally does act to avoid trauma or harm only after being shown that this is possible. In learned helplessness, then, the self first discovers it has no effective power to act, no ability to achieve its goals, and then concludes there is no point acting. This paralysis of will, understood as a habit, is the result of actual helplessness in a given environment. In cases of weatherlessness, in contrast, the self first finds itself in an indifferent, no-mood mood, without temperament or disposition, and this mood washes over will, drowning it, the self then having no inclination to act at all. In learned helplessness, the self's will to act is defeated by its actual environment. And the self *learns* that fact. In weatherlessness, the self's will is defeated by its own indifferent mood and a-disposed temperament (and the physiological, environmental, and cultural forces that create and sustain this mood and temperament). And the self *expresses* that fact. The result is the same – paralysis of action;



however, the cause is different (and, therefore, any remedy also would be different).

Manufactured consent, following Lippmann (who coined the term in his 1922 *Public Opinion*) and Herman and Chomsky (who took it up in their 1968 *Manufacturing Consent*), is the idea that formally or outwardly democratic regimes can support themselves without any overt coercion by employing propaganda-functioning mass communications that create citizen consent. Here the roles of the media and manufactured consent in a democracy are viewed as functionally parallel to the roles of the military and violence in an old-fashioned dictatorial or openly authoritarian regime. Understood in a political context, both manufactured consent and weatherlessness are societal creations. However, in these two cases of manufacturing, both the immediate producers and the resulting product are very different. Manufactured consent produces just that – consent – through the work of profit-driven corporations and investors who utilize mass media, government agencies, and regulation of social interactions to serve their private interests. Weatherlessness, on the other hand, produces vapid spectatorship, non-engagement, and non-allegiance in politics as a result of an indifferent mood and a temperament lacking all disposition. Weatherlessness does not manufacture consent – or dissent; it manufactures a-consent, even “sleeping through a revolution.”

And it may well be that we will have to repent in this generation. Not merely for the vitriolic words and the violent actions of the bad people, but for the appalling silence and indifference of the good people who sit around and say, “Wait on time.” (King, Jr. 1968)


Yes, but weatherlessness is not a long marking of time, a waiting on time. It is not waiting, even long-game waiting; it is only sitting – paralysis without expectation or anticipation.

Viewed this way, it is clear that

weatherlessness is fatal for democracy – for any government *of, by, and for* the people. The point is not simply that those who are weatherless do not participate. That is true at the individual level. However, at the social level, weatherlessness is not simply the *death* of some individual’s will. Rather, weatherlessness in effect is the *outsourcing* of the will, a space that allows the creation of a people’s *surrogate* will. In the *End of the Road*, for example, from the novel’s start at Wicomico State Teachers College to its end en route to the Remobilization Farm, Jake does not really himself act at all – but only on the instruction of, only under the control of, the Doctor. Weatherlessness is a means to, and a mark of, authoritarian political regimes.

Here is a natural history or genealogy of authoritarian politics in democratic disguise: At first, those who will not consent must be rendered unable to oppose effectively – the work of armies, jailers, and executioners; then, that opposition, frequently so difficult to control, must be remanufactured more efficiently into consent – the work of advertisers and marketers, mass media professionals, and private corporations; finally, consent, frequently unable to keep hidden the traces of its manufacture (and so remain effective), must be retooled as weatherlessness and its paralysis of inclination and action – the work of mood managers and temperament creators via one’s physiology, environment, and culture (including one’s self).

Like all forms of government, democracy is moody (and I think it is very useful to think of democracy as a mood, affect, and temperament rather than *merely* a doctrine or set of practices). The mood of illiberal democracy – external trappings of democratic government adopted by anti-democratic ways of life – is, at least in large part, weatherlessness. In such regimes, popular unrest, political protest, and social action are mood disorders. The Doctor’s message to Jake, Donald Trump’s message to Americans, Xi Jinping’s message to the Chinese, Viktor



Orban's message to Hungarians, Hitler's message to the Germans: Trust me. When Trump proclaims "Make America Great Again," he is not laying out any platform; he is expressing and strengthening, among his tribe, a mood. *Mood blurs into temperament. Temperament separated from will is an abstraction and without motivation. Will separated from hope makes hope ineffective, mere wish. This hope is a mood.*

I close with three points about weatherlessness in political contexts. First, it is rarely all-or-nothing. One can be, for example, weatherless with respect to a national election but deeply concerned and involved with local school board issues. This means that if one views weatherlessness as a mood blurring into a feeling, there may be little weatherlessness. One feels the school shooting is tragic, feels NRA funds in politics are obscene, or feels perplexed by the idea of schoolteachers carrying guns. But if weatherlessness is seen as a mood shading toward temperament, inclination, and disposition, then weatherlessness clearly is widespread today in American society and in other traditionally liberal and democratic societies. One sees the televised school shooting, reads about dark money in politics, watches pictures of the rainforest set on fire to clear it, drives past extreme poverty and does nothing – rocking with Jake Horner in one's chair. This is paralysis – or its practical equivalent. Weatherlessness is not merely the paralysis of wish; it is also the paralysis of action.

Second, how is this produced? Both psychologically and politically. James described brilliantly the physical process on the nerves – he called it an "economy of nerve-paths" – by which emotion slides into inattention and indifference. (This explanation captures many lives to date in the Trump Era – and while I appreciate the "economy" here, I resent the difficulty of keeping "perturbation" alive.) Emotions,

James (1981 [1890]) wrote, "*blunt themselves by repetition*":

The more we exercise ourselves at anything, the fewer muscles we employ . . . The first time we saw [some stimulus] we could perhaps neither act nor think at all, and had no reaction but organic perturbation. The emotions of startled surprise, wonder, or curiosity were the result. Now we look on with absolutely no emotion (1089).

Third, finally and importantly, weatherlessness has more indirect cultural causes as well as proximate emotional/physiological causes. If every claim is met with a counter-claim, if every fact is suspected on the basis of alternative facts, if a commitment one day is not a commitment the next, if all news is fake according to someone, if science and its critics both are suspect, if many voices shout many messages equally loudly, if every claim is a lie, there may come to seem to be little reason to listen at all. Or, it may be impossible to hear anything at all but collective background noise. Indifference in mood and in practice, weatherlessness, can result from there really being no difference among all alternatives, but it also can result from situations in which it is impossible to judge differences, impossible to differentiate, impossible any longer to look on, as James put it, with any emotion or care. In such cases, Joe was right when he told Jake that pluralism and democracy take political and cultural, not just personal, hope and effort. Hope for that effort is hope for conditions for a more fully democratic mood.

Suddenly everyone was run over by a truck (O'Donoghue 1971, 16).



Works Cited

Barth, John (1969 [1958]). *The End of the Road*. New York: Bantam.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari (1991 [1994]). *What is Philosophy? [Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?]*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Dewey, John (1989 [1949]). *Knowing and the Known, John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Herman, Edward S., and Noam Chomsky (1968). *Manufacturing Consent*. New York: Pantheon Books.

James, William (1981 [1890]). *The Principles of Psychology*, vol. 2. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

King, Jr., Martin Luther (1968). "Remaining Awake Through A Great Revolution," Washington D.C., 31 March 1968. <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu>.

Lippman, Walter (1949 [1922]). *Public Opinion*. New York: The Free Press.

O'Donoghue, Michael (1971). "How to Write Good." *National Lampoon* 1 (12).

Seligman, Martin (1975a). "Learned Helplessness." *Annual Review of Medicine* 23 (1): 407-412.

Seligman, Martin (1975b). *Helplessness: On Depression, Development and Death*. San Francisco: Freeman

Seligman, Martin (1993). *Learned Helplessness: A Theory for the Age of Personal Control*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Stevens, Wallace (1993 [1947]). "As You Leave the Room." *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens*. New York: Knopf.

Stevens, Wallace (1993). "The Motive for Metaphor." *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens*. New York: Knopf.

Williams, Lucinda (2003). "Ventura." *World Without Tears*. Lost Highway.